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## Public Health vs. Civil Liberties, Hawaiian Style

By ADAM LIPTAK

**F**or almost a century, people who brought their pets to Hawaii have had to quarantine them for as long as four months before they could take them home. Yesterday, that requirement, which was intended to ensure that Hawaii remains the only state without rabies, was eased considerably, and many pets will be able to skip quarantine.

They will want to.

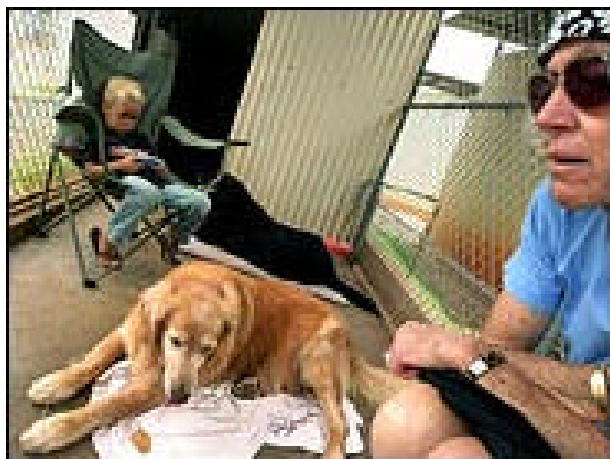


Photo: Cory Lum for The New York Times

Betty Esche and her grandson, Quinn, visited their dogs Sasha, in the back, and Shika, on Monday in the animal quarantine facility on Oahu.

The main quarantine center at Aiea, a 10-minute ride from the Honolulu airport, is a hot, desolate place done up in chain link and barbed wire. It could pass for a scale-model medium security prison, but with more barking.

A grim little convenience store outside the security checkpoint sells soft drinks, Alpo and chew toys.

Elizabeth Conway, a substitute teacher, is still bitter about the 30 days her family's two dogs, Bitty and Chi-Chi, spent here in the summer of 2001.

"My family members were sent to jail," she said. "They thought they had been taken back to the pound."

Last year, 4,681 dogs and cats passed through the quarantine system, which includes satellite facilities on other islands, said Dr. Isaac Maeda, a veterinarian and the manager of the state's rabies quarantine program. Three-quarters of them stayed for 30 days, the rest for four months. Dr. Maeda estimated that about half of the former group would now qualify for a very short stay or immediate release.

Gov. Linda Lingle said the new rules might have a significant economic impact, because people who were reluctant to put their pets through quarantine might now be more likely to visit or move to Hawaii. The new rules also eliminate, she said, what was often a hardship for military families with pets.

"I don't think there's a more popular thing I've done since I've come into office," she said of the changes, which she signed into law last week.

She recalled her own heartache when her pet cockapoo, Spooky, spent 120 days in quarantine in 1975. A cockapoo, the governor said, is a mixture of cocker spaniel and poodle.

Linda Houk, who moved here from Martha's Vineyard in May, was visiting her two cats, Gypsy and Doogie, and her dog Comet on Saturday. She said she came every day.

"It's not a horrible place," she said, unprompted by any question and setting the bar fairly low. But she said she welcomed the new rules.

"I understand the principle of keeping rabies out of Hawaii," she said. "But medicine changes, just as vaccines and testing change."

Dogs at the quarantine facility live in six-foot-wide chain-link kennels under seven-foot-high corrugated metal roofs. Smaller dogs get kennels that are 14 feet long. Larger ones get 25 feet.

Cat kennels are smaller but less spartan. They include platforms and catwalks. The facility has room for about 600 animals, said Carol Miyachi, the operations supervisor at the facility.

Ms. Conway said the quarters were a rude surprise for her family's two dogs.

"These were old ladies," she said, referring to Bitty and Chi-Chi. "They were used to sleeping on our beds."

The pets are confined to their cells for their entire stay, which can give rise to lasting problems.

"Bitty we had to retrain as far as housetraining," Ms. Conway said.

All of this is set up to keep rabies out of Hawaii. The main fear, Dr. Maeda said, is that a rabid pet might bite a wild mongoose.

Ms. Miyachi said she could not recall rabies being discovered in any quarantined pets.

The 30-day option was introduced in 1997, amending rules that had been in place since 1912, when lengthy observation of animals in isolation was the only reliable way to make sure they did not have rabies.

The shorter option, Dr. Maeda said, essentially shifted 90 days of the 120-day observation period to the mainland. To qualify, pets are required to have two rabies vaccinations at least three months apart, a rabies test at least 90 days before arrival and an identification microchip implanted in them.

The new rules, he continued, move the entire period to the mainland. The rabies test must be conducted more than 120 days and less than 18 months before arrival. Depending on when paperwork is delivered and the time of day that pets arrive, pets may be released immediately or in five days or less.

The old program is expensive, which can itself be a hardship for visitors and people who are moving here. A 30-day stay costs owners \$655, a 120-day stay, \$1,080. The new fees range from \$165 to \$224.

Ms. Conway, whose father is in the Army, said that many military families would not be able to take advantage of the new rules.

"The average military family does not have a 120-day prearrival warning," she said. That means they often cannot start the vaccination and testing regimen in time to qualify for the shorter quarantines.

Ms. Houk said her pets were largely content at the facility but that she was not.

"It's really harder on the owner," she said, "because you like to see your dog on its favorite chair watching CNN."